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“As many Ciphers without an I”: Self-Reflexive Violence in the Work of Thomas Nashe

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If herein I haue pleased anie, it shall animat mee to more paines
in this kind. (THOMAS NASHE, *The Unfortunate Traveller*)¹

In a brief digression during his discourse on dreams and apparitions, *The Terrors of the Night* (1594), Thomas Nashe notes his gratitude toward the Carey family. The winter of 1593 found Nashe in prison for including a vitriolic satire concerning the sins of London in *Christs Teares Over Jerusalem* (1593), and it was the Careys who opened their purse to succor him on his release.² Nashe does not initially name his patron in *The Terrors of the Night*, although the work is dedicated to Sir George Carey’s daughter, Mistress Elizabeth Carey. Instead, Nashe describes the isle over which Carey governs, where he spent the Christmas of 1593, as a safe haven: “a fortunate blessed Iland, nere those pinnacle rocks called the Needles. O, it is a purified Continent, & a fertil plot fit to seat another Paradise” (1:374). The Isle of Wight is characterized by the author as the only place to which he has ever “had good voyage in his life,” a place of hospitality and shelter where he can write in safety. He figures his island refuge as a place of sanctuary and retreat,

I am indebted to Simon Palfrey who supervised my MA dissertation on Thomas Nashe at the University of Liverpool, where many of the ideas for this essay originated. More recently, I would like to thank my “Early Modern Prose Fiction” students at the University of Geneva who were simultaneously delighted and horrified by *The Unfortunate Traveller* and who reminded me what it felt like to encounter Nashe’s prose for the first time. I am also grateful for the thoughtful and constructive criticism provided by my two anonymous readers.

1. Thomas Nashe, “The Unfortunate Traveller,” in *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow, 5 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), 2:328. All subsequent quotations from Thomas Nashe’s works are taken from McKerrow’s edition as corrected and supplemented by Frank P. Wilson in the edition of 1958. References appear in the text by volume and page number.

2. Charles Nicholl, “Nashe, Thomas (bap. 1567, d. c. 1601),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19790>. See also C. G. Harlow, “Nashe’s Visit to the Isle of Wight and His Publications of 1592–4,” *Review of English Studies* 14 (1963): 225–42.

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and Carey as a protector: “through him I looke into, and am lookt on in the world; from whence otherwise I were a wretched banished exile” (1:375). The division granted by the sea between isle and mainland allows Nashe to distance himself from the London literary fray, and it reframes and legitimizes Nashe’s exertions by paradoxically rewriting the separation as a position of retrenchment rather than exile.

On this fortunate isle the author has found a place in the world, a site of stability that sits in sharp contrast to the undercurrent of vagrancy, prodigality, and unfortunate travel that usually characterizes the situation of his rhetorical personae. From this privileged location, “carefully protected by so heroically and courageous a Commaunder,” Nashe claims that he no longer has to fear the detraction of his rivals, and that through Carey, his “tender wainscot Studie doore is deliuered from much assault and battrie” (1:374–75). Nashe leaves his imagined assailants unnamed; yet, the reader is led to wonder about the threat of violence associated with the “tender” threshold of Nashe’s study, from which he has been granted temporary reprieve. Nashe depicts the space in which he normally writes as vulnerable to invasion and violence; he remembers its walls as fragile and permeable to the threats and aggression of a dissenting public. Additionally, the reader is led to wonder what goes on behind the study door. For as Nashe also writes, without the support of the Carey family, his days had been dark indeed: “but for whom, my spirit long ere this had expyred, and my pen seru’d as a puniard to gall my owne hart” (1:375).

The aim of this essay is to engage with moments in Nashe’s writing such as these, moments that associate acts of authorship with the potential occurrence of violent dissolution and, in particular, with acts of violence against the self. I draw my examples from Nashe’s expository or speculative prose works rather than from material written for a specific occasion or propagandistic purpose in order to examine the relationship between violence and self-promotion. The rhetorical personae employed by Nashe, as Jonathan Crewe observes, “almost always embody . . . a consciousness of loss and victimization.”³ However, this latent destructive impulse is inseparable from Nashe’s most creative and ambitious linguistic performances. Sometimes it is the author himself who is the aggressor, wielding his pen like a “puniard” in a battle of wits. Indeed, as Georgia Brown observes, the “paradoxical association of heroism with powerlessness” is ingrained in contemporary understandings of Nashe’s life: “by sentimentalizing his biography and turning him into a victim of fortune, publication could be recast as a necessity for this impoverished writer, and not a choice.”⁴ Nashe often fashions his

3. Jonathan V. Crewe, *Unredeemed Rhetoric: Thomas Nashe and the Scandal of Authorship* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 54.

4. Georgia Brown, *Redefining Elizabethan Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 59.

authorial personae by implying their proximity to, or anticipation of, violence; in addition, the association Brown makes between victimization and making a living in print is also preceded by a preprint stage, where Nashe, pen in hand, sits in his study and inks letters on a manuscript page. His printed works continually recollect his anxiety at the moment of writing, in which he contemplates both the genesis and eventual reception of his work. Nashe always writes with an audience in mind and repeatedly imagines the moment of reception, at which point the pages touched by his hands will have been multiplied, and his words placed into the unreliable hands and mouths of others. As Cynthia Marshall observes in *The Shattering of the Self*, early modern authors and readers were complicit in taking a pleasure in literature that presented “an aesthetic of shattering or self-negation.”⁵ I seek to build on that argument by suggesting that Nashe’s perception of his career as an author is indivisible from his sense of having a “dispersive self,” which can be mauled, dismembered, and consumed by critics, but which also enables his work to go out into the world.⁶ Early modern rhetoric describing the products of such a career dwells on their dispersive nature; pamphlets such as Nashe’s are imagined as illegitimate and promiscuous children. Instead of being merely destructive, self-dispersal is also a perversely generative act.⁷

The words quickened by Nashe’s “poore hungerstarued Muse” are treacherous go-betweens that often have a dual agenda; the conveyance of harm often goes hand in hand with entertainment (3:225). Although to catalog or offer commentary on the endemic presence of violence in Nashe’s plots, descriptive passages, and caricatures is beyond the scope of this article, it must be acknowledged that several critics have identified violence as the unifying theme of Nashe’s prose, if it can be said to have one at all.⁸ For example, in *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594), probably the best known of Nashe’s works today, Jack Wilton’s progress through Europe can be measured by the trail of tortured bodies created by the events to which he is a witness. In *Christs Teares Over Jerusalem*, Nashe takes on the persona of Christ in his suffering; following this, he writes of the famine in Jerusalem, during which, in Nashe’s borrowing of a second persona, Miriam beheads and then eats her own child. Here the reader is made to experience what Nashe

5. Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 2.

6. *Ibid.*, 10.

7. See Maria Teresa Micaela Prendergast, “Promiscuous Textualities: The Nashe-Harvey Controversy and the Unnatural Productions of Print,” in *Printing and Parenting in Early Modern England*, ed. Douglas A. Brooks (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 173–96.

8. In relation to Nashe’s *The Unfortunate Traveller* in particular, see the summary presented by Mihoko Suzuki in “Signiorie Ouer the Pages’: The Crisis of Authority in Nashe’s *The Unfortunate Traveller*,” *Studies in Philology* 81 (1984): 348–71.

might have meant when he wrote that “when Christ said, *the kingdome of heauen must suffer violence*, hee meant not the violence of long babling prayers, nor the violence of tedious inuectiue Sermons without wit, but the violence of faith, the violence of good works, the violence of patient suffering” (2:234). Yet, there is little evidence of either good works or patient suffering in Nashe’s apocalyptic tirade. Even in the aforementioned *Terrors of the Night*, a meditation on the most insubstantial of subjects, Nashe’s visceral language gives form and shape to the stuff of nightmares. Dreams and apparitions feed on the remains of the daylight hours and there is no rest for the waking wounded on the cusp of sleep. Nashe’s dreamers illustrate the capacity of the mind to create destructive chimeras in which our thoughts become “but texts to condemne vs” (1:345).

In the discussion that follows, I explore the peculiarly self-reflexive violence that Nashe associates with the act of writing and making a living in print. Sometimes, the author imagines his own demise, and at others he merely contemplates the unstable nature of his profession in terms of physical cost. As Lorna Hutson observes, Nashe demonstrates an “exceptional sensitivity to the materiality of words, the plasticity of discourse, and the hazards of interpretation.”⁹ Like many of his contemporaries, Nashe borrowed the language of the anatomy theater in order to celebrate the penetrating and dissective qualities of his wit;¹⁰ yet, when the pen turns against the self, self-scrutiny and introspection are associated with dissolution rather than triumph. Furthermore, as Stephen S. Hilliard observes, even though Nashe was often put “under attack for personal arrogance, he wrote for readers who did not expect introspection from authors.”¹¹ Nashe’s interiors are typically physical rather than psychological entities.¹² Nashe imagines the act of writing to subtract life from his body, the result of a libidinal process that drains the author of energy in the same way that the page draws ink from the pen. The quickening of a work can also be rapid and ferocious; famously, as Nashe writes concerning his lost collaborative play, *The Isle of Dogs*, the engendering of the “infortunate imperfit Embrion” was accompanied by “tempests . . . so astonishing outrageous and violent” as if his “braine had bene conceiued of another Hercules.” As soon as the

9. Lorna Hutson, *Thomas Nashe in Context* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 4.

10. As Jonathan Sawday notes, even the word *anatomy* itself “was a modish phrase, a guarantee of a text’s modernity” (*The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* [1995; repr., London: Routledge, 1996], 44).

11. Stephen S. Hilliard, *The Singularity of Thomas Nashe* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 101.

12. For a sustained reading of “embodied subjectivity” in Nashe’s *The Unfortunate Traveller*, see Andrew Fleck, “Anatomizing the Body Politic: The Nation and the Renaissance Body in Thomas Nashe’s *The Unfortunate Traveller*,” *Modern Philology* 104 (2007): 295–328.

resulting “monster” was born, he was “glad to run from it” (3:153–54).¹³ His ability to create rhetorical personae that blur the distinction between performance, impersonation, and something approaching self-expression, presents textual versions of the author that may be grounded in self-reflexivity but do not claim self-possession. As Cynthia Marshall also observes, with reference to the highly influential work of Stephen Greenblatt, “the deepest insight in *Renaissance Self-fashioning* is the recognition of a recurring dream of self-annihilation.”¹⁴ The threat of this particular night terror turned Nashe’s thoughts against himself throughout his career and shaped his textual relationships with both his patrons and his critics. After exploring instances in Nashe’s work in which the author contemplates the violence of writing, I will reflect on how Nashe imagines the response to his work by a consuming audience and the brutality he imagines to be implicit in acts of reception. To capture just how brutal these acts could be I will also consider comments made about Nashe by fellow writers, including the adversarial author of *The Trimming of Thomas Nashe* (1597), who depicts Nashe as both a prisoner, shackled and despondent, and as a fugitive, escaping in desperation under cover of night. In the rhetorical games of Nashe and his contemporaries, the fraught relationship between an author and his critics is consistently bodied forth in language of physical dispersal, assault, dissection, and digestion.

I

The first of Nashe’s works that I will consider, *Christs Teares Over Jerusalem* (1593), is characterized by the relentless suffering of its pageant-like procession of authorial personae. In its dedicatory letter to Lady Elizabeth Carey, wife of Sir George Carey, Nashe presents the pamphlet as a humble sacrifice, “an oblation to the ritch burnisht shrine” of his patroness’s virtue (2:9). Nashe exaggerates the modesty topos typically found in such a paratext; his efforts are “imperfect,” “impotent,” and “care-crazed,” demonstrative of what Georgia Brown calls his “perverse tactic of self-undermining in order to achieve self-promotion.”¹⁵ Charles Nicholl assigns *Christs Teares* to a period in Nashe’s life that he calls “the Crack-up,” and asserts that “the pamphlet’s most urgent message is more pathological than devotional. What one is witnessing, through the veil of ‘holy complaint,’ is an actual nervous break-

13. *The Isle of Dogs* was written collaboratively by Ben Jonson and Thomas Nashe and performed in 1597. For his part in its creation Ben Jonson was arrested and imprisoned in the Marshalsea. See Ian Donaldson, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (2001; repr., Oxford University Press, 2013), 111–22.

14. Marshall, *Shattering of the Self*, 30.

15. Brown, *Redefining Elizabethan Literature*, 55.

down, of which the whole work is a product.”¹⁶ Yet, it is difficult to substantiate such a claim; Nashe’s performative ventriloquism in *Christs Teares* is reliant on his ability to take on and cast off “borrowed” personae at will. Nevertheless, the sacrificial dedication does indeed set the tone of Nashe’s engagement with his subject, in which he emphasizes the gross physicality of producing printed literature, where “stayned paper” becomes “this sin loaden earth.”¹⁷ In preparation for the vision of the falling city, Nashe offers a metonymic representation of the work as a whole: a “handfull of Ierusa- lems mummianizd earth, (in a few sheetes of wast paper enwrapped)” (2:9). The fragility of the endeavor is recognized in the final line of the passage, in which the author anticipates failure in the face of his critics: “an easie matter is it for anie man to cutte me (like a Diamond) with mine owne dust” (2:9). As he recognizes, there is a double edge to his undertaking and the attempt to preserve matter in print guarantees neither success nor perpetuity. The particular nature of his fame, or notoriety, means that, like a diamond, he is most vulnerable to critics who either match his style or who use his own writing and reputation against him. If his pamphlet fails to find favor, he has effectively contained within his own creation the means to bring about his downfall; yet, like a diamond, he is otherwise untouchable. The dissolute monuments of a city are put into words by Nashe only to create pages whose inevitable fate is dispersal, producing countless fragments, any one of which could bring about the author’s dissolution.

As a whole, *Christs Teares Over Jerusalem* is often dismissed by critics as being “mind-numbingly didactic.”¹⁸ However, as a meditation on the agonies of writing both devotional and cautionary literature, its poetry is undeniable. More generally, Nashe’s writing is particularly attentive to what Elaine Scarry describes as “verbal forms—such as curses or prayers—that aspire to bring about a visible alteration in the physical surface of the world,” and *Christs Teares* is no exception.¹⁹ The descriptive passages contained in the

16. Charles Nicholl, *A Cup of News: The Life of Thomas Nashe* (London: Routledge, 1984), 169.

17. These lines are taken from the final scene of *The Second Part of the Return from Parnassus* and are spoken by the character Ingenioso. See *The Three Parnassus Plays (1598–1601)*, ed. J. B. Leishman (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1949), 5.4.2116. The character of Ingenioso in *The Parnassus Plays*, which were performed at St. John’s College Cambridge, has been identified as a portrait of Nashe (see Nicholl, *Cup of News*, 231). In the final scene as the characters part, some to respite and a more pastoral landscape, Ingenioso prepares for his voyage to the “Ile of Dogges,” armed with little but his friend’s wishes that he keep a “store of gal / Sharpely to wound the guilty world withall” (5.4.2123–24).

18. Per Sivefors, “‘All this tractate is but a dream’: The Ethics of Dream Narration in Thomas Nashe’s *The Terrors of the Night*,” in *Textual Ethos Studies, or Locating Ethics*, ed. Anna Fåhræus and AnnKatrin Jonsson (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 162.

19. Elaine Scarry, “Donne: ‘But yet the body is his booke,’” in *Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 82.

admonitory prose demonstrate Nashe's hypersensitivity to both the limits of language and its logic-defying potential. As the following discussion of eternity demonstrates, there could never be ink and paper sufficient to capture anything absolutely, especially the absolute itself: "Though all the men that euer God made were hundred handed like *Briareus*, and shoulde all at once take pennes in theyr hundred handes, and doe nothing in a whole age together but sette downe in Figures & characters as many myllions or thousands as they could, so many millions or thousands could they neuer set down as this worde of three sillables, *Eternall*, includeth; an Ocean of yncke would it draw dry to describe it" (2:169). Nashe's engagement with the paradoxical qualities of language is a nightmare particularly reserved for the person of the author. His surreal fantasy of a hundred-handed multitude engaged in the task of writing for all eternity reveals the absurdity of using three meager syllables as a surrogate for the infinite. The unfathomable depth of the inky ocean is a place in which the author may drown, exhausted by his own attempt to match creation.

The moment of contact between pen and paper is given much thought by Nashe and is often put in terms that imply violent exchange or physical cost. As he explains in the rewritten prefatory epistle to the 1594 edition of *Christs Teares*, in which he retracts the apology to his literary rival Gabriel Harvey present in the original edition, the animating process, during which pen is finally put to paper, is typically accompanied by a violent expulsion of energy. Nashe needs only to make a declaration of intent in order to rouse the ire of his critics: "There is a mountaine in *Cyrenaica* consecrated to the South-wind, which if it be toucht with a mans hand, there arise exceeding boystrous blastes, that tosse and turmoile the sands like waues of the Sea. As great a miracle as that in me is experienst, for let me but touch a peece of paper, there arise such stormes and tempestes about my eares as is admirable. Euen of sands and superficiall bubbles they will make hideous waues and dangerous quicke-sands" (2:186). The creation of a tempest is inevitable. The spontaneous release of energy is turbulent and chaotic, a natural, inescapable tumult that rends the air. The resulting furore images both the commotion of cacophonous speech and the violent response of an imagined critical audience. Nashe conflates the oral, aural, and written qualities of his work, figuring the effect of the amplification as having its cause in contact;²⁰ a hand disturbing the surface of the fabled mountain is equated to the brush of fingers, or a pen, on paper. Touch becomes sound

20. For the problems of communication raised by addressing an imagined audience in print, see Walter J. Ong, "The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction," *PMLA* 90 (1975): 9–21. For the relevance of Thomas Nashe's work to the thought of Marshall McLuhan, see Neil Rhodes, "On Speech, Print, and New Media: Thomas Nashe and Marshall McLuhan," *Oral Tradition* 24 (2009): 373–92.

and the landscape shifts; an unbroken surface becomes treacherous, where “quicke-sands” and rupturing bubbles prove to be unstable foundations. As in much of Nashe’s writing, initially unified images are exaggerated and made grotesque, giving way to excess and horror. Throughout his works Nashe uses language in place of physical touch; his writing imagines contact and contagion, and processes of consumption and digestion in which surfaces become permeable, fluid, and highly vulnerable to penetration. His pen pierces, scourges, drains, and anatomizes, and as Nashe is keen to point out, the implied victim is often the authorial persona, or author surrogate himself.

The travail of writing pervades *Christs Teares*, the retelling of a story in which “stories haue lost and tyred themselues” (2:61). The author even resorts to whispering words of encouragement to his pen through the performance of a veil of tears: “plucke vppe a good courage, mine infant pen, and wearily struggle (as well thou maist) thorow thys huge word-dearthing taske” (2:69). As Brown writes, “the anxiety of dissolution, the fear that he will somehow use up so many of his personal resources that there will be little or nothing left to sustain him” is a constant concern.²¹ When the narrator imagines that the act of putting pen to paper is causing him to age prematurely, it would imply that Nashe imagines a libidinal connection between his own bodily fluids and the ink he traces on the page. “Rather let my brains melt all to ink,” he writes, and “let me suddainly waxe olde, and woe-wrinckle my cheekes before theyr tyme, by describing the deplored effectes of theyr sinnes within” (2:15, 65). The drained and desiccated body parallels the drained inkwell, the inevitable consequence of trying to compass the sins of Jerusalem and London. Furthermore, to juxtapose the sacred with the profane, Steve Mentz observes that Nashe appears terrified by “the liquefaction of the act of writing,” noting that Nashe’s apparent fear of liquidity is particularly evident in his pornographic manuscript poem *The Choice of Valentines*.²² For a writer of both pornographic and devotional works, it is perhaps fitting that one of the words in *Christs Teares* that Nashe is credited with coining by the *Oxford English Dictionary* is *palpabrize*, a verb conveying the sense of “to feel, handle, touch,” literally to make palpable, as if all words must be tested, as Jason Scott-Warren writes, “on the touchstone of the body.”²³ In the hand of the author, the pen leaks bodily fluids:

21. Brown, *Redefining Elizabethan Literature*, 95.

22. Steve Mentz, “Day Labor: Thomas Nashe and the Practice of Prose in Early Modern England,” in *Early Modern Prose Fiction: The Cultural Politics of Reading*, ed. Naomi Conn Liebler (New York: Routledge, 2007), 18, 24.

23. Jason Scott-Warren, “Nashe’s Stuff,” in *The Oxford Handbook of English Prose, 1500–1640*, ed. Andrew Hadfield (Oxford University Press, 2013), 215. See also Neil Rhodes, *Elizabethan Grotesque* (London: Routledge, 1980), 26. Placed as the word is in a discussion concerning the way that God can be known through scripture, it is also possible that Nashe was thinking of a

it is both “tear-stubbed” and drawn dry, made impotent in the face of such depravity.

II

The sacrificial tone of Nashe’s devotional writing is a far cry from the relentless energy of his comically satirical pieces; here, the work of a “cleane different vaine” (2:201) acts as a countermovement that limits the potentially violent exhaustion of wit and will. The ability of satire to pierce, scourge, and inflame the reader is deeply embedded in Nashe’s concept of what it means to fashion a living in print and is given voice in his praise of the Italian satirist Aretino, a figure of intercession for satirists everywhere: “hee writ with naught but the spirite of inke. . . . His pen was sharp pointed lyke a poinyard; no leafe he wrote on but was lyke a burning glasse to set on fire all his readers. With more than musket shot did he charge his quill, where hee meant to inueigh” (2:264). Pens and poniards go hand in hand in Nashe’s imagination, and pages and quills are focused, incendiary devices. As Jonathan Goldberg argues in *Writing Matter*, a study of the material conditions of early modern handwriting, the relationship between the hand, the pen, and the quill-sharpening knife, suggests that “a material sphere is opened by those tools, one that circulates through the violence of the instrument, one that shapes the world . . . through violence.”²⁴ The manual wielding of the pen and the knife locates the handwritten page as a scene shaped by cutting, pricking, and sharpening. Although Nashe’s pamphlets reached his audience with little literal trace of the author’s own hand remaining, except when he blames printing errors on his “bad writing,” they retain the memory of their creation in manuscript, from a time when the author’s pen was “on foote” (2:241).²⁵ With the speed at which Nashe implies that he writes, his hand moving swiftly as if it were running, “the text appears to be under construction even as it is read.”²⁶ Autonomous limbs become interchangeable as they are implicated in the breathless travail.

As Goldberg also points out, the act of writing is etymologically linked to the act of scoring, cutting, or tearing.²⁷ Indeed, in *Pierce Penilesse his Supplication to the Divell* (1592), a pamphlet whose titular persona was most associ-

pun on the word *palabras*, the Spanish word for words themselves, which appears in the work of several early modern English writers, including Thomas Kyd, William Shakespeare, and Thomas Dekker. I am grateful to Richard Strier for pointing out this resonance. See *OED Online*, <http://www.oed.com/>, s.v. “palabrize, v.” and “palabra, n.”

24. Jonathan Goldberg, *Writing Matter: From the Hands of the English Renaissance* (Stanford University Press, 1990), 74–75.

25. See the note listing printing errors that follows the dedicatory epistle in *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594).

26. Brown, *Redefining Elizabethan Literature*, 88.

27. Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, xvii. See also *OED Online*, s.v. “write, v.”

ated with the author himself, Nashe writes that he was “determined to clawe Auarice by the elbowe, till his full belly gaue mee a full hande, and lette him bloud with my penne (if it might be) in the veyne of liberalitie: and so (in short time) was this Paper-monster, *Pierce Penilesse*, begotten” (1:161). The “paper-monster” is born from a metaphorical act of bloodletting, or the opening of the vein out of which the author hopes generosity and benevolence will flow. The gory image unites the dissective ability of the pen with the production of the letter (*Pierce Penilesse* itself) that, in Nashe’s witty literary game, is destined for receipt by the devil. Here, Nashe gleefully imagines his pen cutting into the personification of an abstraction; it is a grotesque celebration of his ability to use his skill to penetrate boundaries that would otherwise keep him apart from hoarded wealth, in his case a wealth of words as well as the hoped for financial remuneration. The pamphlet is a product of this desired excess, which couples the fear of dearth and hardship with fantasies of charity and even reward.

To feign a petition to the devil for patronage suggests, albeit satirically, the risks involved in a career as a pamphleteer. *The Terrors of the Night* is unusual among Nashe’s works owing to Nashe’s depiction of George Carey as a good patron, “heroical and courageous,” in opposition to the figures of disappointment that litter his other works. *Pierce Penilesse*, in particular, famously captures the pathos of the state of rejection following from the interest of “a goodlie tall fellow that shineth in his silkes” who then has the gall “to come and out face a poore simple Pedant in a thred bare cloake, and tell him his booke is prety, but at this time he is not prouided for him” (1:241). As we have already seen, the protection of a patron allows an author to “looke into” and be “lookt on in the world”; yet Nashe’s prose often depicts the moment when a mutually agreed and socially legitimate gaze breaks down. In the address to Henry Wriothesley that prefaces *The Unfortunate Traveller*, for example, Nashe writes of how “the eye that sees round about it selfe, sees not into it selfe,” intending to make a point about his lack of critical judgement when it comes to his own work (2:201). However, within the context of Nashe’s appeal for favor, it also emphasizes the necessarily reciprocal nature of the investment made between an author and those perceived to be the governing cultural authorities. Although this essay is concerned with the author-as-subject rather than subjectivity as an end in itself, Eric Langley’s observation in *Narcissism and Suicide in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* that “sixteenth- and seventeenth-century conceptions of subjectivity are characteristically predicated upon systems of reciprocity, reflection, and a governing foundational structure of mutuality” is still very useful.²⁸ A lack of consistent aristocratic patronage would have

28. Eric Langley, *Narcissism and Suicide in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 2.

denied Nashe a “governing foundational structure” on which to build his career. The author makes his petition to Wriothesley on the basis that he is well known to be a “louer and cherisher” of poets, but also acknowledges that “vnrepriueably perisheth that booke whatsoever to wast paper, which on the diamond rocke of your iudgement disasterly chanceth to be shipwrackt” (2:201). For Nashe, who belonged to a writing milieu in which the relationship between author and consumer was far from consistently reciprocal or assured, finding oneself out of favor and unsure of the next role to play was probably the fate most feared. Therefore, when Nashe writes in *The Terrors of the Night* of a time when his pen might have “seru’d as a puniard” to gall his own heart, the reader is asked to contemplate what happens when an author, famed for his scourging wit, turns that talent against himself, to become himself the pathetic victim of self-reflexive satire.

Nashe’s juxtaposition of the knifelike pen and the inkwell heart is striking due to the self-reflexive impetus of the authorial violence, which turns the pen away from profit and toward a vulnerable self. The image couples the poniard-like precision of the pen with a rhetorical attack on the author’s own persona, who is saved from an assault on his interior only by the intervention of his patron, George Carey, who redirects Nashe’s gaze back at society and away from the hell of his own making. In *The Terrors of the Night*, Nashe writes that “when Night in her rustie dungeon hath imprisoned our ey-sight,” the darkness encourages self-reflection due to the occlusion of the outside world: “the table of our hart is turned to an index of iniquities, and all our thoughts are nothing but texts to condemne vs” (1:345). In this particular nightmare, the body becomes a book in which sins and regrets are written, legible, and indelible. Similarly, as John Donne would also remind his congregation at St Paul’s, it is the body not the mind that acts as a ledger of transgression, for “these be the Records of velim, these be the parchmins, the endictments, and the evidences that shall condemn many of us, at the last day, our *own skins*.”²⁹ Moments such as these, in which the divided self becomes capable of dialogue, are crucial to Langley’s understanding of how narcissistic and suicidal tendencies are represented in early modern literature. As he insightfully continues: “crucially, it is still within the context of a sense of mutually constructed individuality, reliant upon interlocution and relation, that the self-reflections of the narcissist and the self-destruction of the self-slaughterer must be read. . . . Indeed, they are exceptional only in the extent of their conformity to what become increasingly involved and shockingly tight dynamics of reciprocation.”³⁰ In Nashe’s

29. John Donne, *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, 10 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953–62), 3:103.

30. Langley, *Narcissism and Suicide*, 3.

writing, however, the contemplation of inwardness is not typically constructed as a purely psychological activity; instead, Nashe's personae literally contemplate their body cavities, disturbed by the way that their own flesh reveals, rather than conceals, their interiority. Even the process of thinking takes on material presence in Nashe's imagination, so that "idle wandering thoughts" can be likened to buzzing "wasps and flies," and the labor that causes men's hands to "glowe and blister after their dayes worke" can be likened to "the glowing and blistring of our braines after our day labouring cogitations" (1:376, 3:197).

Divided selves are a thematic feature of *The Unfortunate Traveller*. For example, when Nashe describes the fate of the chaste matron Heraclide, who is raped by Esdras over the body of her husband, he renders the psychological as physical. After the act she finds a mirror to see if her "sin were not written on her forehead" (2:294), and after gazing at herself, she blushes with shame, even though, to her knowledge, there are no other witnesses: "my selfe doo but behold my selfe, and yet I blush" (2:294). Her dissolution is framed by the moment of narcissism, and she stabs herself while meeting her own gaze: "my hand and my knife shall manumit mee out of the horreur of minde I endure. . . . Point, pierce, edge, enwidem, I patiently affoorde thee a sheath" (2:294–95). In addition, an echo of the scene occurs later in the narrative when Jack Wilton imagines being vivisected by the anatomist Doctor Zacherie. The imagination of Nashe's energetic narrator transforms the drops of sweat trickling down his skin into "a smooth edged razer tenderly slicing downe" his breast, and as he concludes, "theres no such readie way to make a man a true Christian as to persuade himselfe he is taken vp for an anatomic" (2:305). Faced with the threat of penetration and dismemberment, Jack Wilton hints at his ability to be made penitent, as he contemplates the physical anguish of the soul being severed from the body, which is reduced in the doctor's cell to a fragile, permeable union of fluids and limbs.

The sober moment in *The Terrors of the Night* in which the author considers turning his own pen against himself, may not have the comic and grotesque brilliance of the episodes in his explicitly fictional writing but all engage in what Jonathan Sawday has described as the "dissective culture" of the Renaissance. As Sawday argues, the literature of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries provided an unprecedented imaginative response to the burgeoning science of anatomy through the appropriation of anatomical discourse as the metaphorical basis for works that explored, divided, and articulated bodies, selves, and even abstract concepts such as wit and melancholy. Nashe's own *Anatomic of Absurditie* (1590) is one such example of the fashionable genre. As Sawday writes, "imagining one's own dissection was a compositional device unique to early-modern culture," and for the purposes of his wider argument, Nashe's "dreams of dissection"

become a literary touchstone that defines a cultural phenomenon, fusing the implications of self-reflexive violence with “a hint of transgressive desire.”³¹ In the examples cited above, Nashe’s authorial personae express sadness and exhaustion at their inability to control the products of their imagination. In addition, he creates fictional characters whose situations cause them to look inward at their own dissolution; not only is Heraclide’s household decimated by the plague but her own body is forcibly exposed and invaded. Furthermore, Jack Wilton’s love of violent spectacle is suddenly inverted to direct his gaze, so ready to peer through unlikely crannies, at his own interior. Therefore, when reread in the context of Jack Wilton’s later adventures, Nashe’s assertion that “the eye that sees round about it selfe, sees not into it selfe,” classifies introspection as a grotesque and even taboo act. Indeed, as Sawday notes, the emblem of dissective culture “was the reductive deity of division *Anatomia*, whose attributes were the mirror and the knife. Those attributes were derived from the story of Perseus, the mythical hunter of the Medusa.”³² The gaze of Medusa, which petrifies as well as mesmerizes provides an analogy for the “potentially transgressive gaze of the subject who studies his or her own bodily interior . . . for in its depths it may conceal the source of the individual’s own dissolution.”³³ For the character of Heraclide, the only way to break the gaze of the Medusa is to commit suicide, a tabooed fate that also lingers in Nashe’s recollection of the night terror in which he levels his pen at his heart. It is a kind of narcissism, but one that is unconcerned with surfaces and only with the guilty knowledge of what lies beneath.

Conversely, as the following example demonstrates, Nashe’s authorial personae are also capable of playing the victim to great comic effect. Imagining one’s own graphic dissolution becomes a strategy that can be employed as a means of deconstructing the increasingly exaggerated conventions of elite literature. By opening up the body, Nashe’s writing exposes what, in Cynthia Marshall’s words, “a culture in its official versions of itself is suturing together and publicly solidifying.”³⁴ In the sonnet “If I must die, O, let me choose my death” from *The Unfortunate Traveller*, for example, Nashe delivers an extraordinary burlesque of the Elizabethan sonnet vogue, in which authorship is indelibly linked to violence. The sonnet belongs to the sequence of poems attributed by Nashe to his fictionalized rendering of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, the “courtier, poet and amateur cultural

31. Sawday, *Body Emblazoned*, 49. See also Richard Sugg, *Murder after Death: Literature and Anatomy in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 174–88.

32. Sugg, *Murder after Death*, 3.

33. *Ibid.*, 8.

34. Marshall, *Shattering of the Self*, 2. Marshall’s book also includes a chapter on Petrarchanism and “erotic martyrdom” (56–84).

model par excellence.”³⁵ Typically, critical readings of these poems note their traditional nature; for example, as Crewe notes, “the poems Nashe gives to Surrey in *The Unfortunate Traveller* are as authentic (nonparodic) as any of their kind.”³⁶ Additionally, Mihoko Suzuki also notes that the sonnet is “highly conventional, if clearly sexual”,³⁷ however, neither critic notes the heightened sense of aggression demanded of the beloved, or the exaggerated posture of victimization displayed by the author. The imitation of Petrarch usually demands that the author-poet should articulate the paradoxical suffering caused by the pangs of love; yet, Nashe overgoes this precedent by depicting a Circe-like mistress with lips like “cupping glasses” and eyes like “searing yrons,” capable of sucking out the lover’s soul “with kisses” and turning him into a “loathsome swine.” Surely the parody is clear:

If I must die, O, let me choose my death:
 Sucke out my soule with kisses, cruell maide,
 In thy breasts crystall bals embalme my breath,
 Dole it all out in sighs when I am laide.
 Thy lips on mine like cupping glasses claspe,
 Let our tongs meete and striue as they would sting,
 Crush out my winde with one strait girting graspe,
 Stabs on my heart keepe time whilest thou doest sing.
 Thy eyes lyke searing yrons burne out mine,
 In thy faire tresses stifle me outright,
 Like Circes change me to a loathsome swine,
 So I may liue for euer in thy sight.
 Into heauens ioyes none can profoundly see,
 Except that first they meditate on thee.

(2:263)

The grasp of the mistress is sufficient to crush the feeble body of the lover, a body that is also stifled and pierced. Physical proximity appears to require not just sexual penetration but also the breaking of all sorts of bodily boundaries; there is no room for tenderness or longing here. For Nashe’s version of Surrey, the only heaven imaginable for the poet following this encounter must surely be the place where lovers go when they have shuffled off their mortal coil. Yet, Nashe’s comic timing is, as always, impeccable. He frames the sonnet within prose that both introduces ambiguity concerning the identity of the victim and refigures the sonnet as a verbal molestation of the beloved. When describing Surrey’s overzealous acts of authorship he describes how “from prose hee would leape into verse, and with these or such like rimes assault her” (2:262). The abrupt shift from the

35. Brown, *Redefining Elizabethan Literature*, 68.

36. Crewe, *Unredeemed Rhetoric*, 82.

37. Suzuki, “‘Signiorie Ouer the Pages,’” 366.

ventriloquized poetry of Surrey to the satirical prose of Jack Wilton shifts the identification of the victim from poet to subject, an escape for the authorial persona within a persona only realized at the last second.

III

Nashe's ability to mimic the voices of multiple discourses and to rapidly shift between them at will creates authorial personae that are constantly shifting, eluding definitive categorization. His contemporaries were particularly sensitive to the polyphonic and self-deconstructing qualities of his prose and often aped his style in order to discredit him.³⁸ For this reason, Nashe's most vocal audience actually appears to be complicit with what we have seen Eric Langley describe as a "shockingly tight dynamics of reciprocation." For example, the attack on Nashe's person in the defamatory pamphlet *The Trimming of Thomas Nashe*, written under the pseudonym of "*Don Richardo de Medico campo*, Barber Chirurgion to Trinitie Colledge in Cambridge," repeatedly returns to images of a transgressive gaze.³⁹ The style of the prose is very close to Nashe's even though the author seeks to defame his quarry, ending with the recognition that the hunter and the hunted are very much alike, bound to each other in spite of their abuses. Instead of providing evidence of Nashe's singular temperament, the pamphlet indicates that entering the precarious writing culture of the early modern market for printed pamphlets demanded a show of complicity in what could be a dangerous pursuit.

The author's opening gambit endeavors to illustrate Nashe's singularity by attempting to depict the unfortunate rival as bound, visualized, categorized and censured, or "trimmed" as he puts it himself. For example, in the prefatory material directed at the reader, the vitriolic author, who is now usually taken at his word and identified as Richard Lichfield,⁴⁰ arrives at a conundrum that still perplexes his successors: how to define Nashe and his aberrant work. Here, he refers to a folktale in which a request is made by the moon to her mother to clothe her nakedness: "she answered, there could bee no coate made fit for her, for her instabilitie, sometime she being in the ful, and sometime in the wane; so hee, being a man of so great reuolution, I could not fit him, for if I had vndertaken to speak of one of his prop-

38. For a modern perspective, see Ann Rosalind Jones, "Inside the Outsider: Nashe's *Unfortunate Traveller* and Bakhtin's Polyphonic Novel," *English Literary History* 50 (1983): 61–81.

39. Richard Lichfield, *The Trimming of Thomas Nashe Gentleman, by the high-titled patron Don Richardo de Medico campo, Barber Chirurgion to Trinitie Colledge in Cambridge* (London, 1597). All subsequent quotations from Lichfield's work are taken from the 1597 edition. References will appear in the text by signature mark.

40. See Benjamin Griffin, "Nashe's Dedicatees: William Beeston and Richard Lichfield," *Notes and Queries* 44 (1997): 47–49.

erties, another came into my mind, & another followed that, which bred confusion, making it too little for him" (A4r). The pamphlet may be most famous for its inclusion of a woodcut, "our only contemporary image of Nashe, a mustachioed young gentleman with a smirk on his face and iron fetters on his legs," yet the author repeatedly struggles to lay a firm hand on his victim.⁴¹ In one of the pamphlet's most striking features, Lichfield fantasizes about Nashe's creative genius turning inward on itself by wishing that Nashe might keep his wit to himself "and not defile the world withall" (D1r). He describes Nashe's wit as a destructive force, harmful to both the writer himself and to anyone who may read the products of its employment. By doing so, he relinquishes his own attack in favor of one that actually originates from Nashe's own actions. Nashe is likened to Actaeon, the hapless hunter, whose accidental glimpse of the goddess Diana bathing resulted in his being turned into a stag who was then pursued and killed by the creatures he once loved: "so whatsoeuer thy wit goeth about, it first defiles it, and so brings destruction to thine owne body. Thy wit, thy wit, *Tom*, . . . twil whip thee, twill worke thine ouerthrow, twill quite destroye thee: *Actaeon* (as wise a man as you) no wayes could escape it, for all his loue to his hounds and swift flight when he saw their felnes, but was deuoured of his owne dogs" (D2v). The emphasis that Lichfield places on the reciprocal relationship between the misuse of wit and the destruction of the body is striking; the products of Nashe's imagination pose a self-reflexive threat that is predominantly physical rather than psychological.

A similar parallel is also made by Francis Meres in *Palladis Tamia* (1598), who reflects in more sympathetic terms on the reception of Nashe's famously seditious attempt at collaboratively written drama, summarizing that "as Actaeon was wooried of his owne hounds: so is *Tom Nash* of his *Ile of Dogs*."⁴² Actaeon functions as a figure consumed by the implications of his own actions and as Wendy Wall observes, the hunter's moment of transgression in the original myth can be likened to the bold step of making oneself visible in the early modern print market: "publication mimics Actaeon's transgression; it is a dangerous act that makes the author vulnerable to critical, physical, and social dismemberment. . . . Writers and printers generally suffered economic hardship, social ridicule, and dangerous entanglements with the state. Mostly, they could be 'dismembered' (made non-members)

41. Steve Mentz, "Jack and the City: *The Unfortunate Traveler*, Tudor London, and Literary History," in *A Companion to Tudor Literature*, ed. Kent Cartwright (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 501. Mentz also suggests that the layout of the title page of *The Trimming of Thomas Nashe* deliberately mirrors that of Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller*, an observation that can be extended to the manner in which both works end with an execution, as I discuss below.

42. Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia: Wits Treasury being the second part of Wits Common Wealth* (London, 1598), 286r.

by being excluded socially from the sources of power.”⁴³ The baying of Actaeon’s hounds recalls the clamoring attackers waiting by Nashe’s “tender wainscot Studie doore” who promise not praise but “much assault and battrie.” In this retelling of the myth, Nashe appears in the roles of both Diana and Actaeon; he is imagined as both suffering exposure and as being the instigator of the transgressive act that ends in violent punishment. The dismemberment that Wall discusses may be chaotic, brutal, and grotesque in contrast to the systematic and dissective dissolution that Sawday associates with introspection, but both model the imaginative failure of a reciprocal gaze, by which an author can legitimately “looke into” and be “lookt on in the world.”

Lichfield additionally emphasizes the destructive effect of forbidden vision by describing Nashe’s *Have With You to Saffron Walden* (1596) as a “cockatrice,” cursing its inception as another of Nashe’s monstrous births. The cockatrice, or basilisk, was said to possess the Medusa-like quality we have seen described by Sawday, of being able to petrify its onlooker. Lichfield’s curse, therefore, imagines Nashe’s literary attack rebounding on the author, its deadly gaze inverted: “thy eye-beames will reflect vpon thy selfe, and will be burning glasses to thine owne eyes” (D3v). Instead of possessing the ability to set the minds and hearts of his readers alight like Aretino, Lichfield imagines only Nashe’s self-wrought destruction. He attacks Nashe’s implosive tendency, and although it may only be a straw man that he sets up to insult, he alights on the peculiarly insubstantial quality of Nashe’s wit: “thou art as a bundell of strawe that beeing sett on fire consumes it selfe all in smoke, but . . . thou hast no true fire in thee, all smother, no thing that can warme a man, thou art as many Ciphers without an I, which they wanting are of them selues nothing” (C4r–v). The attack on Nashe is both personal and professional and imagines Nashe to be engaged in a constant process of dissolution that blurs the distinction between the author and his work. A cipher may have no value by itself but when placed within a system it “increases or decreases the value of other figures according to its position.”⁴⁴ Therefore, by denying Nashe an “I” he refuses to acknowledge Nashe’s place as an author within society and imagines only a commodity that intrinsically negates its own value.

Furthermore, in a moment that is reminiscent of the scene at the anatomist’s in *The Unfortunate Traveller*, when Jack Wilton contemplates his soul bleeding out from the metaphysical prison of his failing body, Lichfield’s most shocking attack occurs when he urges Nashe, imagined once again to be incarcerated, to commit suicide. In this passage, the jocular “trimming”

43. Wendy Wall, “Disclosures in Print: The ‘Violent Enlargement’ of the Renaissance Voyeuristic Text,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 29 (1989): 52.

44. See *OED Online*, s.v. “cipher/cypher, *n.*”

of Lichfield's title becomes a stab wound, which casts a sinister shadow over the corrective or healing profession suggested by the author's self-identification as a "Barber Chirurgion": "Now if thou wouldest bee free from thy prisons, make a hoale in thy first prison, breake out there, and so thou escapst both, thou neuer canst be caught again: and by this thou shalt crie quitance with thy bodie, that thus hath tormented thee, and shalt leaue him buried in a perpetual dungeon. Here let mee giue a cut or two on thy latest bred excrements, before I goe to the finishing of the perfect Cut" (E4v). The hands of both authors are implicated in the fatal incision, Nashe's in Lichfield's suggestion of how far he has fallen, and Lichfield's own in his boast to make the "perfect Cut." More than mere editorial advice, the perfect cut involves more than a single piercing. Following his fantasy of Nashe's successful suicide, Lichfield imagines sharing the author's dismembered body among everyone he has harmed in a failed attempt at atonement: "for though thy body were shared into infinite indiuiduals, yet euery one could not haue his part whome thou hast abused, for recompence for thy iniury done vnto him" (F4r). The image is gruesome but also suggestive of a travesty of the Eucharist, whereby dispersal is associated with a perverse kind of unity.⁴⁵ Indeed, Lichfield almost ends his pamphlet with an attempt at reconciliation with Nashe, or at least with the recognition that writing abuse pamphlets involves a certain amount of complicit guilty pleasure; as Maria Teresa Micaela Prendergast observes, there is even an underlying eroticism to male writers engaging in "intimate, obsessive, and passionate" printed encounters.⁴⁶ For, as Lichfield begins to conclude, he and Nashe are not so different after all, and the coat he sought to fashion at the beginning of the pamphlet is in fact fit to clothe them both:

This I speak not to wage discord against thee, but rather to make an end of all iarres, that as wife & husband will brawle and be at mortall fewde al the day long, but when boord or bed time come they are friendes againe and louingly kisse one an other: so though hetherto we haue disagreed and beene at oddes, yet this one coate shall containe vs both, which thou shalt weare as the cognisaunce of my singuler loue towards thee, that wee liuing in mutuall loue may so dye, and at last louing like two brothers *Castor* and *Pollux*, or the two sisters *Ursa maior* and *Ursa minor* wee may bee carried vp to heauen together, and there translated into two starres. (G2v)

This penultimate movement, in which Lichfield imagines himself and Nashe immortalized in the heavens, despite only being two lowly authors guilty of breeding "excrements," is a perfect example of how pamphlets

45. For a reading of cutting and dispersal in the redemptive context of George Herbert's writing, see Adam Smyth, "'Shreds of holinesse': George Herbert, Little Gidding, and Cutting Up Texts in Early Modern England," *English Literary Renaissance* 42 (2012): 452–81.

46. Prendergast, "Promiscuous Textualities," 188.

such as these can simultaneously contain moments of both extraordinary violence and unexpected clemency, even grace. Perhaps Lichfield is suggesting that, like the brothers Gemini who divided their afterlife between Mount Olympus and Hades, he and Nashe can share their immortality, or that, as in the case of the reunited mother and child comprising the constellations Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, mutual recognition can stave off a deadly fate. In defiance of its disposable nature, the pamphlet is invested with the desire to be taken seriously as literature, even though the abuses it contains are made in jest. Pervading Lichfield's risky display of wit is the desire to make a connection with an audience of true commercial patrons, who "might with good acceptance digest what hetherto they haue read" (G1v).

Unsurprisingly, the author's explicit acknowledgment of complicitous reading and writing is short-lived. In the final pages, Lichfield's authorial persona undergoes a final metamorphosis that exchanges the role of barber for that of a self-appointed curer of souls: a reminder of the capricious nature of the pamphleteer. Writing of the state of grace that consistently eludes Nashe, he includes two invocations that initially appear to support Nashe's cause, but which soon turn once again to contemplating his quarry's demise, this time in the form of an official execution. Addressing the provost marshal of London, he asks that Nashe be sent to the Tyburn hangman, known as Bull, positioning himself as ready witness: "I with my brethren the Barber-Chirurgions of London, wil be there, because we cannot phlebotamize him, to anatomize him and keep his bons as a chronicle to shew many ages heereafter that sometime liued such a man" (G4r).⁴⁷ Nashe's body is imagined as brutalized and displayed in clear sight, strung up as an example to all others of his kind. When all flesh is gone, Lichfield promises to retain the skeletal structures of Nashe's interior as edifying matter for ages to come. Following the execution that spectacularly ends his own piece of prose fiction, Nashe may have promised any displeased readers "neuer to bee out-landish Chronicler more" (2:328), but in Lichfield's tentative grasp the spectacle is rewritten, and the author of *The Unfortunate Traveller* is turned from chronicler into chronicle itself, his didactic remains becoming the book in which authorial sins can be read. It is at this moment, perhaps, that Lichfield realizes he has finally gone too far, abruptly ending with an appeal to the tastes of his own audience:

And if perhaps in this Trimming I haue cut more partes of him than are necessrie, let mee heare your censures, and in my next Cut I will not be so lauish: but as the Curate, who when he was first instald into his Benefice, and among other Iniunctions being inioynd (as the order is) to forewarne

47. See Sugg, *Murder after Death*, 170.

his Parish of Holy-daies, that they might fast for them. . . . In like manner, I hauing but newly taken Orders in these affaires, if heere I haue been too prodigall . . . , tell me of it, limit me with a Fast, and in short time you shall see me reformed. (G4v)

In his own request for kindly censure, we see that Lichfield, despite his wit, must also be prepared to share Nashe's scaffold if he is to continue writing in this vein.⁴⁸ Advocating abstinence, rather than digestion, he acknowledges that the time for festivity is over, to be replaced by a period of Lenten fare.

IV

It is with the theme of consumption in mind then that I would like to make a final return to Nashe's own writing. As Andrew Hadfield has recently observed, Nashe uses images of "taste and consumption as a symbolic reference to wider issues of writing and culture."⁴⁹ In order to capture Nashe's ambivalent attitude toward this issue it is useful to consider that his most common reference to consumption pertains to sickness. His writing is full of consumptive bodies that betray themselves, whose internal processes are subject to fluxes beyond the ken of quack physicians. Even death is preferable to sickness, which, "like a Chancerie sute . . . hangs two or three yeare ere it can come to a iudgement" (1:373). In the case of a consumption, dissolution comes from within and is indifferent to external attempts to stay its course: "rather it is as a man should be rosted to death, and melt away by little and little, whiles Phisitions lyke Cookes stand stuffing him out with hearbes, and basting him with this oyle and that sirrup" (1:373). Elaine Scarry has suggested that early modern authors chose to write about failing bodies as a recuperative strategy, and that by verbally reconstructing the body, reimagining its interior spaces, and exploring the violence to which it is susceptible, authors could reclaim that which "actively repels mental attention." The act of writing, the "inlaying of names and narratives," is therefore an act of redemption, dependent on "the human touch needed for consecration."⁵⁰ In Nashe's writing, consumptive processes actively test the author's limits of control, and fittingly, it is with the image of grotesque

48. For more on the "imaginative identification" between "the punisher and the punished" in Nashe's work and the implications of this dynamic for early modern drama, see Bruce R. Smith, "Rape, Rap, Rupture, Rapture: R-Rated Futures on the Global Market," *Textual Practice* 9 (1995): 439.

49. Andrew Hadfield, "'Not without Mustard': Self-Publicity and Polemic in Early Modern Literary London," in *Renaissance Transformations*, ed. Margaret Healy and Thomas Healy (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 65.

50. Scarry, *Literature and the Body*, 86.

consumption, in which the man melts “away by little and little,” that Nashe leads into his praise of the Carey family with which this essay opened. For Nashe the professional author, the human touch most desired seems to be that of a patron, a figure who in his ability to offer the author respite and validation, fills simultaneously the roles of lover, curate and physician. As Nashe writes, the “next plague and the neerest” to a consumption “is long depending hope friuolously defeated. . . . It is like a pore hunger-starud wretch at sea, who still in expectation of a good voyage, endures more miseries than Iob” (1:374). Job, of course, is the archetypal figure of patient suffering, who is confronted with not only physical distress but also the suspicion that he is being punished unjustly. Without a patron, an “I” to provide with a cipher, Nashe’s best hopes lay with the anonymous consumers of a multitudinous and unpredictable popular audience, capable of both supporting an author and destroying him.

As Nashe writes in *Strange Newes* (1592), a response to Gabriel Harvey’s literary attack on his friend Robert Greene and on his own earlier work *Pierce Penilesse*, there is little that an author can do to protect himself from his enemies and detractors: “what could I doe but draw vppon him with my penne, and defende my selfe with it and a paper buckler as well as I might?” (1:262). Instruments of the literary trade are refashioned as weapon and shield. Indeed, in both *The Unfortunate Traveller* and *Nashes Lenten Stuffe* (1599), Nashe even calls his faceless supporters to arms, by imagining his writing to be capable of mobilizing an army of weapon-carrying readers, all qualified to leap to the defense of his reputation. In the former, Nashe claims that “the perusing of this pamphlet” is sufficient to provide the reader with a “case of ponyardes” (2:207), and in the latter he expands on the theme: “One boone you must not refuse mee in, (if you be *boni socji* and sweete Oliuers,) that you let not your rustie swordes sleepe in their scabberds, but lash them out in my quarrell as hotely as if you were to cut cables or hew the main mast ouer boord, when you heare mee mangled and torne in mennes mouthes about this playing with a shettlecocke, or tossing empty bladders in the ayre” (3:225). His use of metaphors drawn from the process of ingestion to describe his reputation being “mangled and torne in mennes mouthes” emphasizes the act of destructive mastication over the desire for nourishment. In a similar moment of exasperation, this time in the address to the readers that prefaces *Christs Teares*, Nashe baits his critics with a dismissal that implies a further link between the consumer of printed works and the literal act of consumption: “Haue at you, backebiters, with a bargaine; raile vpon me till your tongues rotte. . . . Mince mee betwixt your teeth as small as Oatmeale, I care not, so I haue Crownes for your scofs” (2:186). Nashe perhaps even intended the final word in this sentence to be a pun, eliding the mockery of his audience with their voracious, unseemly appetite. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists the first use of *scoff* to

mean the act of eating as occurring in the eighteenth century, but Nashe's extraordinary way with words has been overlooked before.⁵¹ In Nashe's imagination, a "rending, chewing," and chattering mouth stands in the place of whole human readers, who only partially ingest matter in order to fuel their appetite for controversy.

In *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin describes the act of eating as a festive and vital process. It is the triumphant conclusion to labor, a reward that reaffirms the survival of the consumer: "the body transgresses here its own limits; it swallows, devours, rends the world apart, is enriched and grows at the world's expense. The encounter of man with the world, which takes place inside the open, biting, rending, chewing mouth, is one of the most ancient, and most important objects of human thought and imagery. Here man tastes the world, introduces it into his body, makes it part of himself. . . . Man's encounter with the world in the act of eating is joyful, triumphant; he triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself."⁵² Critics have frequently commented on the carnivalesque nature of Nashe's writing; however, his peculiar variety of grotesquery is often less festive than at first might be thought. As C. S. Lewis brilliantly observed, his images are "comic only if you see them in a flash and from exactly the right angle. Move a hair's breadth, dwell on them a second too long and they become disturbing."⁵³ Nashe may describe his muse as both "poore" and "hungerstarued" (3:225), but his readers and critics are also ravenous. His anxiety concerning his engagement with his public is put in terms of being devoured himself, making him an Actaeon figure once again, who flees the jaws, not only of what Francis Meres describes as his own "paper dogges," but those of his audience also.⁵⁴

For example, in *Lenten Stuffe*, Nashe's most sustained meditation on the nature of commodities, nourishing and otherwise, the author rails against the politic readers who, in his opinion, are fully capable of willfully misinterpreting authorial intentions and, in his case, turning japes into sedition: "But, Lord, howe miserably do these Ethnicks, when they once march to the purpose, set words on the tenters, neuer reading to a period (which you shall scarce find in thirtie sheetes of a lawyers declaration) wherby they might comprehend the intire sence of the writer together, but disioynt and teare euery sillable betwixt their teeth seuerally; and if by no meanes

51. See Jürgen Schäfer, *Documentation in the OED: Shakespeare and Nashe as Test Cases* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980).

52. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 281.

53. C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1954), 414.

54. Meres, *Palladis Tamia*, 286v.

they can make it odious, they will be sure to bring it in disgrace by ilfauoured mouthing" (3:214–15). Nashe complains that "ilfauoured mouthing" or partial digestion can only lead to an incomplete understanding of what is written, in a process by which words are tortuously stretched and dismembered. The author is denied wholeness, or the ability to convey "the intire sense," and as a result his meanings become impoverished, Lenten stuff indeed. As Nashe pithily continues, "that greedy seagull ignorance is apt to deuoure any thing" (3:212). *Lenten Stuffe* also includes a verbal self-portrait of the author in which Nashe offers a characteristically grotesque imagining of his shattered reputation. Once again, however, he manages to turn his victimization into triumph:

The straunge turning of the Ile of Dogs from a commedie to a tragedie two summers past, with the troublesome stir which hapned aboute it, is a generall rumour that hath filled all England, and such a heauie crosse laide vpon me, as had well neere confounded mee: I meane, not so much in that it sequestered me from the woonted meanes of my maintenance, which is as great a maime to any mans happinesse as can bee feared from the hands of miserie; or the deepe pit of despaire wherinto I was falne, beyond my greatest friendes reach to recouer mee: but that, in my exile and irksome discontented abandonment, the silliest millers thombe or contemptible stickle-banck of my enemies is as busie nibbling about my fame as if I were a deade man throwne amongst them to feede vpon. So I am, I confesse, in the worldes outwarde apparance, though perhappes I may prooue a cunninger diuer then they are aware, which if it so happen, as I am partely assured, and that I plunge aboue water once againe, let them looke to it, for I will put them in bryne, or a piteous pickle, euery one. (3:153)

The image of his enemies as sticklebacks and miller's thumbs, feeding off his remains as if he were a waterlogged cadaver, is belied by his will to resurrect his career and make a mockery of their presumptions. In spite of his maimed and exiled state, he suggests that it is their folly and not his own that will be brined like his titular red herring and henceforth preserved for perpetuity. As an author who repeatedly imagines his own violent dissolution it is interesting that Nashe's last published work depicts the author coming back to life as a partially consumed corpse who is capable of plumbing depths beyond the comprehension of his detractors in order to breathe once again. It is this process of suffering and redemption, or what Crewe has called the juxtaposition of "guerrilla resourcefulness" and "purgatorial self-mortification," that each of Nashe's works embodies in various ways.⁵⁵

55. Jonathan Crewe, review of *Thomas Nashe in Context*, by Lorna Hutson, *Modern Philology* 88 (1990): 75.

Indeed, as Nashe illustrates in the final pages of *The Unfortunate Traveller*, the mob is always hungry for entertainment. The audience's eagerness for the spectacle of Cutwolfe, the final Italian villain of the piece, being broken on the wheel, leads them to threaten the executioner himself: "torture him, teare him, or we will teare thee in peeces if thou spare him" (2:327). Faced with the danger of his own dismemberment, the executioner performs his task admirably, while Nashe likens his skills to those of craftsmen adept at their trade. To the list of cook, fiddler, and saddler, he might as well have added pamphleteer, or what Lichfield would have called the "arch architectour" of all that is scurrilous and disreputable about the print trade (G4r). At the end of *The Unfortunate Traveller*, Nashe merges the voices of the author, narrator, and surrogate in the text, and writes directly to his audience, asking for their judgement on his literary experiment: "if herein I haue pleased anie, it shall animat mee to more paines in this kind" (2:328). The travels of Jack Wilton, himself a "page" personified, are, like all of Nashe's travails, quickened by exertion; the audience is moved by narratives animated by the pains, or effort, of the author. Indeed, as all of Nashe's pamphlets demonstrate, the author is only endowed with life by the consent of an audience, and animated only within the terms of its licensing, irrespective of his threat that he will have the approval of his readers in spite of their hearts. As Francis Meres concludes his address to Nashe in *Palladis Tamia*:

Therefore comfort thy selfe sweete *Tom.* with *Ciceros* glorious return to Rome, & with the counsel *Aeneas* giues to his seabeaten soldiours, lib. I. *Aeneid.*

*Pluck vp thine heart, & driue from thence both feare and care away.*⁵⁶

56. Meres, *Palladis Tamia*, 286v.